



Jo McDougall (1935 -)

Jo McDougall was born and raised in Arkansas, where she received an MFA under the legendary teacher and editor Miller Williams. She was director of the creative writing program at Pittsburg State University 1987-1998, and currently she resides in Leawood, Kansas.

McDougall brings a Southern sensibility to her writings about the great open expanses of Kansas—her work is more narrative, perhaps, and her humor is direct. But the influence of the Kansas dialect is strong, her use of sharp visual images, and themes of endurance and morality. She is a committed realist. Some of her poems, for me, recall the Grant Wood's paintings, but with more humor.

Time creates a vivid dimension within McDougall's Midwestern settings, through the agent of memory. McDougall writes: "Memory is the poet's calico landscape of the imagination, recalled from the advantage of maturity." In her poetics, memory appears as flashbacks, obsessive replays, time travel, selectivity, sustained observations, and sharp images. Yet, ironically, McDougall's unadorned survival strategy constructs a natural theology.

In "Blessing," McDougall creates a story with well chosen details. The Kansas setting is alluded to with the presence of wind, storm, and sun. The small town intimacy with neighbors is suggested by the narrator's nosiness. How long was the narrator watching in order to see all these details, including the hidden panties? Is her last line a sincere prayer?

BLESSING

My neighbor hangs out the morning wash
and a storm dances up.
She strips the line,
the children's pajamas with the purple ducks,
her husband's shorts,

the panties she had hidden under a sheet.
When the sun comes out
she comes back
with the panties and the sheets, the shorts and the pajamas.
This is my ritual, not hers.
May her husband never stop drinking and buy her a dryer.

Education: McDougall graduated from DeWitt High School. She received an A.A. from Stephens College, BA from University of Arkansas (1957) and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville (1985).

Career: This poet worked has five books of poetry from BookMark Press-University of Missouri-Kansas City; University of Arkansas Press; and most recently Autumn House Press. Her work has been adapted for film (Emerson County Shaping Dream), theater, music, and an artist's book. Copies of the film are available at jomcdougall@sbcglobal.net

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